

Oral Questions

Two weeks ago Canada's defence minister announced major cuts in defence expenditures and set off a time bomb for more to come. It is called mass destruction.

All regions of the country that have bases, thousands of military personnel, the Royal Canadian Legion and millions of Canadians are worried about the future of the Canadian forces and the great name they have made for Canada around the world.

Why has the government adopted such irrational cuts to the Canadian forces at a time when it has no defence policy? It seems determined to destroy a large part of one of the great institutions of our Canadian fabric, namely the Canadian forces.

Hon. Mary Collins (Associate Minister of National Defence and Minister responsible for Status of Women): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is confused about two different issues.

The announcements that were made several weeks ago by the Minister of National Defence were the reallocation of our existing spending and a reduction in some of the procurement programs which were no longer considered to be priorities, to fit within our existing budget over the coming years.

The second issue, which we are now addressing, is the longer term defence policy review to look at the future roles and the future needs of our Armed Forces throughout this country.

I want to remind the member that the objective is that we will continue to have an Armed Forces, men and women who are professionals, well equipped and are relevant to tomorrow's world. That is the commitment we have and that we will continue to fulfil.

Mr. Len Hopkins (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke): Mr. Speaker, it sounds as if the minister has backed off and there are going to be no base cuts as announced.

Canadian forces bases cuts would take place in the regions of the country already hard hit economically by the government's own created in Canada recession. Mass destruction is no way to reward the Canadian forces for their outstanding contribution both inside and outside Canada.

Why will the government not bring in a defence policy paper and allow discussion on this issue before it implements its mass destruction of the Canadian forces

and the economy of the Canadian countryside? Are there going to be cuts or are there not?

Hon. Mary Collins (Associate Minister of National Defence and Minister responsible for Status of Women): Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. friend knows quite well that the work is ongoing. It has involved many people having input, many experts in defence areas, to discuss the future of our Armed Forces.

I think the hon. member also recognizes that there is too much infrastructure at the moment for the size of the force and the composition of the force, and that we will be looking at making changes and adjustments to the costs in order that we can maintain a capable, efficient Armed Forces for the future.

All these decisions will be made by cabinet in due course with opportunities, we anticipate, for the public to review and be involved in this process as we continue through the coming months.

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IMMIGRATION

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

On May 14, the minister released what she then said was a comprehensive and accurate report on the Al-Mashat affair, stating that: "no conspiracies by any individual or government agency, either Canadian or foreign, was involved in this case".

How, then, does the minister reconcile that statement, the fact that Mr. John Burns, an FBI agent, travelled twice to Vienna to meet with Mr. Al-Mashat during the time his application to come to Canada was being processed?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, first of all I stand by the statement I made. We in my department are unaware of any connection between the FBI and Dr. Al-Mashat.

There certainly was no attempt by any foreign power to influence any decision on our part or on the processing of the immigration application.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I note in passing that the minister did not deny that such visits took place. If they did take place, it is